

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

ACDA-05 IO-11 AID-05 EB-07 PC-01 AF-06 NEA-10 /102 W

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P 032208Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WAHDC PRIORITY 1829

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 CARACAS 1313

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS

EO 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR VE

SUBJ: CURRENT LATIN AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF THE US

REF: STATE 10605

1. INTRODUCTION: THE FOLLOWING RESPONSES ARE KEYED TO THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS POSED IN THE REF. THEY ARE NECESSARILY GENERAL AND IMPRESSIONISTIC IN NATURE. IN ADDITION, IT SHOULD BE NTED THAT THEY REFLECT WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED ESTABLISHMENT OPINION -I.E., THE VIEWS OF THE GOVT, MEDIA, MILITARY AND BUSINESS LEADERS. ORDINARY VENEZUELNAS MAY WELL LOOK ON OUR CURRENT AFFLICTIONS WITH EQUAL BEWILDERMENT BUT THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT MOST OF THEM STILL REGARD THE US AS THE FIRST COUNTRY OF THE WORLD AND A WONDERFUL PLACE TO VISIT.

2. IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND THAT VENEZUELAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE US ARE TO A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE SHAPED BY THE SAME US MEDIA THAT SO STRONGLY INFLUENCE OUR OWN PERCEPTIONS OF OURSELVES. THE PRESS HERE CARRIES A HEAVY DOSE OF WIRE SERVICE MATERIAL ON DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US, THE LEADING NATIONAL NEWSPAPER TAKES THE NYT SERVICE AND RUNS SOME OF THAT PAPER'S COLUMNISTS, THE PRINCIPAL NEWS MAGAZINE AND THE MOST INFLUENTIAL NEWSPAPER COMMENTATOR DRAW HEAVILY ON US PUBLICATIONS IN DISCUSSING OUR DOMESTIC CONTROVIERSIES OVER FOREIGN POLICY. LOCAL TV AND RADIO

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USE OUR WIRE SERVICES IN REPORTING ON THE US AND SO ON.

NOT LONG AGO A VENEZUELAN GENERAL OFFICER COMMENTED TO ONE OF OUR MILITARY OFFICERS THAT HE WAS TIRED OF THE "SO-CALLED PROBLEMS" OF THE US TAKING UP EVERY MORNING'S FRONT PAGE.

3. VENEZUELAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE US ARE NO LONGER IN ANY CASE THE FAIRLY STABLE MIXTURE THEY WERE FOR MANY YEARS. IN ADDITION TO OUR OWN TRAUMAS, THE SHIFT IN THE UNDERLYING RELATIONSHIP RESULTING FROM PETROLEUM NATIONALIZATION IS BOUND TO PRODUCE CHANGES. US PERFORMANCE ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE IN THE YEAR AHEAD WILL ALSO HAVE ITS IMPACT. THE COLLAPSE IN VIETNAM PROBABLY COST US LESS HERE THAN WE FEARED, IN LARGE PART BECAUSE VENEZUELAN, AGAIN INFLUENCED BY THE US MEDIA, HAD WRITTEN THAT CAUSE OFF SOME TIME BACK. BUT OUR FAILURE TO BLUNT THE CUBAN INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA AFTER ANOTHER DIVISIVE INTERNAL DEBATE WOULD BE LIKELY TO RAISE CONSIDERABLY MORE ALARM ABOUT THE CAPACITY OF US LEADERSHIP. WE ARE, IN OTHER WORDS, IN A STATE OF TRANSITION WHEN IT COMES TO THE VENEZUELAN VIEW OF THE US. END
INTRODUCTION

A. VENEZUELAN GENERALLY STILL REGARD THE US AS A MILITARY AND ECONOMIC SUPERPOWER, BUT SEE US AS RELATIVELY LESS POWERFUL AND RESOLUTE IN THE AFTERMATH OF VIETNAM. WATERGATE MAY HAVE BEEN SOMETHING OF A PLUS HERE IN DEMONSTRATING THAT OUR OWN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM "WORKS" BUT CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESS REVEALATION ABOUT THE CIA BEWILDER AND DISTURB THE MORE CONSERVATIVE VENEZUELAN IN PARTICULAR. THE MOST DAMAGING ASPECT APPEARS TO BE THE FEELING THAT THE USG CAN PROTECT NEITHER ITS SECRETS NOR ITS FRIENDS. THE CHILEAN CASE HAS NOT RECENTLY PRODUCED MUCH REACTION HERE, PERHAPS BECAUSE VENEZUELAN ASSUMED CIA INVOLVEMENT FROM THE OUTSET AND BECAUSE THEY HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING THAN AMERICANS OF THE REAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS THAT WERE AT WORK IN CHILE.

B. PRIVATELY VENEZUELAN OPINION LEADERS ARE INCREASINGLY DUBIOUS ABOUT THE US CAPACITY TO HOLD THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES IN CHECK. ON ONE OCCASION WE ARE AWARE OF (A PRIVATE MEETING WITH SENATOR JAVITS) A GROUP OF PROMINENT VENEZUELAN EVEN QUESTIONED OUR RELIABILITY IN FULFILLING US COMMITMENTS UNDER THE RIO TREATY. BUT IN GENERAL WE THINK THE JURY IS STILL OUT ON THIS ISSUE. AS PREVIOUSLY NOTED, MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE OUTCOME OF THE CUBAN ADVENTURE IN ANGOLA, AS WELL AS ON THE RESULTS OF
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CASTRO'S EFFORTS TO CREATE POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE IN AND AROUND THE CARIBBEAN. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT MOST VENEZUELAN DO NOT SEEM AT HEART TO ACCEPT OUR CONCEPT OF JOINT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BASIC SECURITY OF THE HEMISPHERE. FOR GOOD OR EVIL, DEPENDING ON THE IDEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINT, THEY STILL SEE US AS THE GUARDIANS OF THIS REGION.

C. THE TRADE ACT HAS, OF COURSE, BROUGHT HOME TO

VENEZUELANS THE REALITY THAT CONGRESSIONAL ADMINISTRATION DIFFERENCES CAN BE CRITICAL IN DEALING WITH TH US. THE GOV AND MOST INFLUENTIAL VENEZUELANS KNOW THAT THEY MUST CONTEND WITH CONGRESSIONAL OPINION- OPINION THEY ARE INCLINED TO SEE AS USUALLY MISINFORMED AND UNFAIRLY HOSTILE WHEN FOCUSED ON THIS COUNTRY. BUT, AS DISCUSSED BELOW, THE INABILITY TO GRASP FULLY THE NATURE OF OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM LEADS TO OCCASIONAL SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE REAL EXTENT AND MEANING OF SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO BRANCHES. THE GOV ALMOST SURELY HARBORS THE SUSPICION THAT WE SOMETIMES USE THE EXCUSE OF POSSIBLE AND ACTUAL CONFLICTS WITH THE CONGRESS TO AVOID TAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS AND ACTIONS. IN ANY CASE, THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TRADE ACT ALONE HAS UNDOUBTEDLY LEFT DOUBTS HERE ABOUT THE VALUE OF US COMMITMENTS IN THE CURRENT WASHINGTON ATMOSPHERE. THE EFFECT, HOWEVER, IS PROBLEMATIC SINCE VENEZUELA SEEKS TO REDUCE "DEPENDENCE" ON THE US AS A MATTER OF POLICY AND LOOKS ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AS NECESSARILY LIMITED BY THE NATURAL CLASH OF OUR RESPECTIVE INTERESTS.

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1830

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D. THE GOV ONLY PARTIALLY UNDERSTAND OUR POLITICAL PROCESS. THE TRADITION HERE OF A STRONG EXECUTIVE AND RIGID PARTY DISCIPLINE MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR VENEZUELANS TO SEE BEYOND THE APPARENT CONFUSION AND CONFLICT IN WASHINGTON. THEY FIND IT PARTICULARLY HARD TO UNDERSTAND THAT OUR PRESIDENT CANNOT IN FACT NECESSARILY IMPOSE HIS WILL WHEN HE REALLY WANTS TO. THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF SUSPICION HERE THAT IF THE ADMINISTRATION MEANT IT THE CONGRESS COULD BE PREVAILED UPON TO CHANGE THE TRADE ACT.

THE GOV DOUBTS THE SINCERITY OF EITHER BRANCH IN PROCLAIMING "TRADITIONAL TIES TO OUR LATIN NEIGHBORS," NOTING A PURPORTED LACK OF INTEREST ON WASHINGTON'S PART IN THIS COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS AND DEMOCRATIC ACHIEVEMENTS. THE EFFECT OF THESE FEELINGS ON VENEZUELAN FOREIGN POLICY IS AGAIN DIFFICULT TO GAUGE. THAT POLICY IS ROOTED

IN HARD PRACTICAL INTEREST (PROTECTION OF THE OIL PRICE) AND IS LIKELY TO MAINTAIN ITS ESSENTIAL CHARACTER WHATEVER THE VIEW IS HERE OF THE US. BUT THERE CAN BE NO QUESTION THAT OUR CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE GOV POLICY THRU THE RATIONAL IDENTIFICATION OF MUTUAL INTERESTS IS DAMAGED BY THE ATTITUDE THAT WE CANNOT OR WILL NOT DELIVER ON THE TRADE ACT.

E. THE GOV IS INCREASINGLY UNEASY ABOUT CUBA'S INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA AND DECIDEDLY DISTURBED BY CUBAN-GUYANESE COOPERATION IN THE AIRLIFT. THE GOV CONCURS IN OUR OBJECTIVE OF ENDING ALL FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA. THE PERCEPTION HERE OF THE USG ROLE IN THIS AFFAIR WILL DEPEND ON HOW IT COMES OUT.

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IF CUBA AND THE MPLA TRIUMPH WHILE WE STAND BY, A VERY CONSIDERABLE REVISION MAY TAKE PLACE IN THE LOCAL VIEW OF OUR LEADERSHIP CAPACITY.

F. VENEZUELA IS A LEADING PROPONENT OF COLLECTIVE ACTION IN DEALING WITH THE US. THIS ADVOCACY, AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT FREQUENTLY, REFLECTS THE OVERRIDING OBJECTIVE OF PROTECTION ON THE OIL PRICE. FOR THIS COUNTRY SELA IS MORE THAN ANYTHING A SHIELD FOR OPEC. BUT THE VENEZUELAN ALSO UNHAPPILY RECALL THEIR OWN INEFFECTUAL ATTEMPTS DURING MORE THAN 10 YEARS TO DEAL BILATERALLY WITH US ON HEMISPHERE OIL PREFERENCES AND TRADE RELATIONS. WE CAN EXPECT THAT VENEZUELA WILL CONTINUE TO STRESS COLLECTIVE THIRD-WORLD ACTION IN MULTILATERAL FORA ON INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ISSUES WHILE HOPING FOR THE SMOOTHEST POSSIBLE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH US.

G. IT IS NOTABLE IN THIS REGARD THAT CONCERN FOR SAUDI ARABIA'S ATTITUDE PREVAILED OVER OUR INFLUENCE AND THE GOV'S NATURAL INCLINATION TO VOTE FOR POSTPONEMENT OF THE ZIONIST ISSUE IN THE UNGA. THE DIFFERENCE WAS, OF COURSE, THAT OUR DISPLEASURE IS NOT READILY TRANSLATABLE INTO EFFECTIVE RETALIATION, WHEREAS THE SAUDIS CAN DO CRITICAL DAMAGE TO VENEZUELA'S OPEC SHELTER. WE THINK VENEZUELAN PERCEPTIONS OF DECLINING US EFFECTIVENESS ON THE WORLD SCENE HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE GRADUAL SHIFT TOWARD A "NEUTRAL" POSITION ON INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ISSUES. BUT THE BIG FACTOR IS THE CRITICAL VENEZUELAN INTEREST IN MAINTAINING THIRD-WORLD AND OPEC SOLIDARITY.

H. THE GOV SEEKS TO DIVERSIFY ITS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS. OTHER MARKETS FOR ITS OIL IN ANY TRULY SIGNIFICANT SENSE

ARE PROBABLY NOT TO BE FOUND. BUT SINCE WE HAVE NO APPARENT MEANS TO NEGOTIATE THE EXTENT OF ACCESS TO OUR PETROLEUM MARKETS, SINCE WE MAINTAIN POLICIES WHICH IN ANY CASE REDUCE THAT ACCESS FOR VENEZUELA, AND SINCE THE TRADE ACT DAMPENS HOPE FOR NON-TRADITIONAL EXPORTS TO THE US, WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO INCREASING EFFORTS TO SPREAD OUT IMPORTS HERE. WE WILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME KEEPING OUR MARKET SHARE. ON THE POLITICAL SIDE WE ENVISAGE CONTINUING VENEZUELAN ATTEMPTS TO CONSTRUCT AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY WITHOUT GUIDANCE FROM ANY PARTICULAR COUNTRY. THERE ARE SIGNS, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOV IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN CLOSER TIES WITH OTHER GOVTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST

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FRATERNITY.

4. THE GOV TELLS US THAT THE SECRETARY'S RECENT INITIATIVES REPRESENT "PROGRESS" AND REFLECT A MORE FORTHCOMING US ATTITUDE TOWARD THE THIRD WORLD. BUT THE BASIC DOCTRINE HERE HAS BEEN STATED OFTEN BY MANUEL PEREZ GUERRERO IN HIS COMMENT THAT THE USG AND THE OTHER INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES IGNORED THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE LDC'S UNTIL FORCED TO PAY ATTENTION BY A WORLD THROWN INTO CRISIS. HE BELIEVES, AS DOES HIS GOVT, THAT THE NIEO IS ESSENTIAL AND THAT PETROLEUM AND EVERY OTHER FORM OF LEVERAGE AT HAND MUST BE USED ON THE INDUSTRIALIZED DEMOCRACIES TO OBTAIN IT. IN THE VIEW HERE IT IS THAT KIND OF PRESSURE THAT HAS MOVED THE USG TO TAKE THE FIRST GRUDGING STEPS TOWARD ACCOMMODATION WITH THE THIRD WORLD. WHILE THE GOV WILL CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR PRESSURE POINTS, WE DO THINK NEVERTHELESS THAT VENEZUELA WILL ULTIMATELY BE MORE OPEN TO PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS THAN SOME OF HER MORE IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED FELLOW MEMBERS OF OPEC AND THE G'77.

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